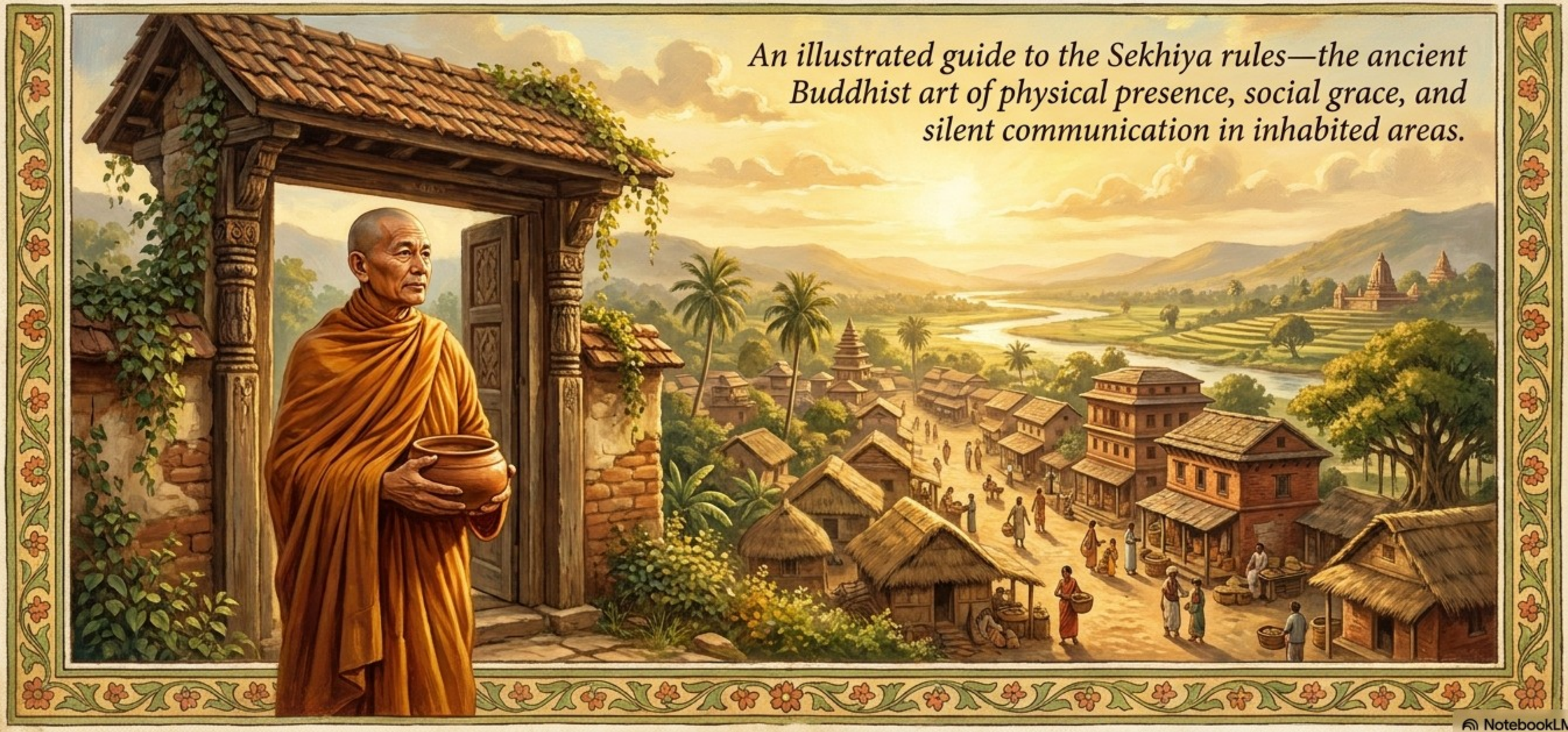
The Mindful Alms Round



An illustrated guide to the Sekhiya rules—the ancient Buddhist art of physical presence, social grace, and silent communication in inhabited areas.

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The Geography of Restraint

The *75 Sekhiya* (training) rules govern behavior primarily in inhabited areas—laymen's homes, streets, and alleys. They are not arbitrary punishments, but a contextual dress code for the public stage.

The Wilderness *The Village*

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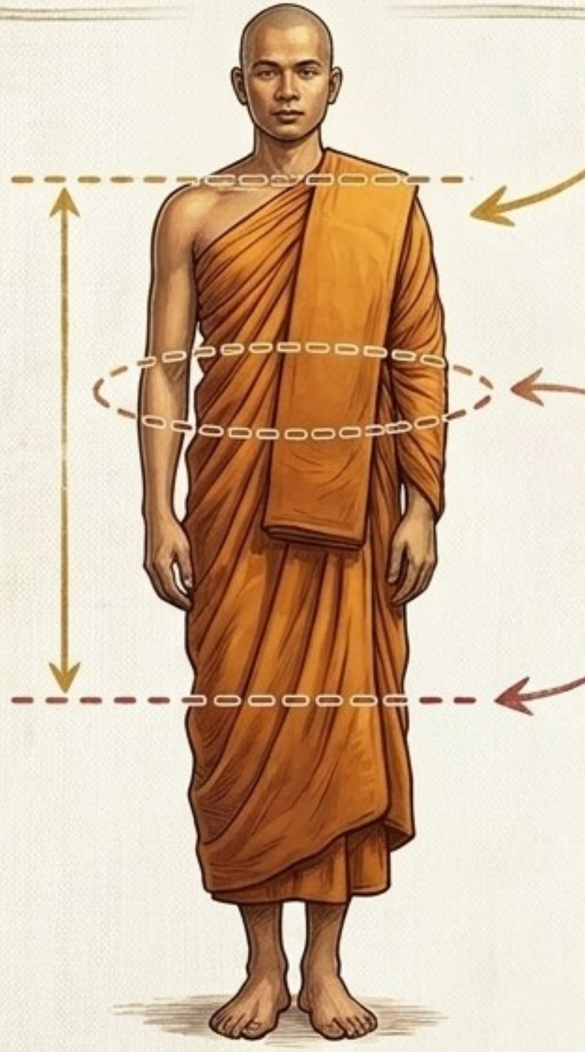
Covering the Three Circles

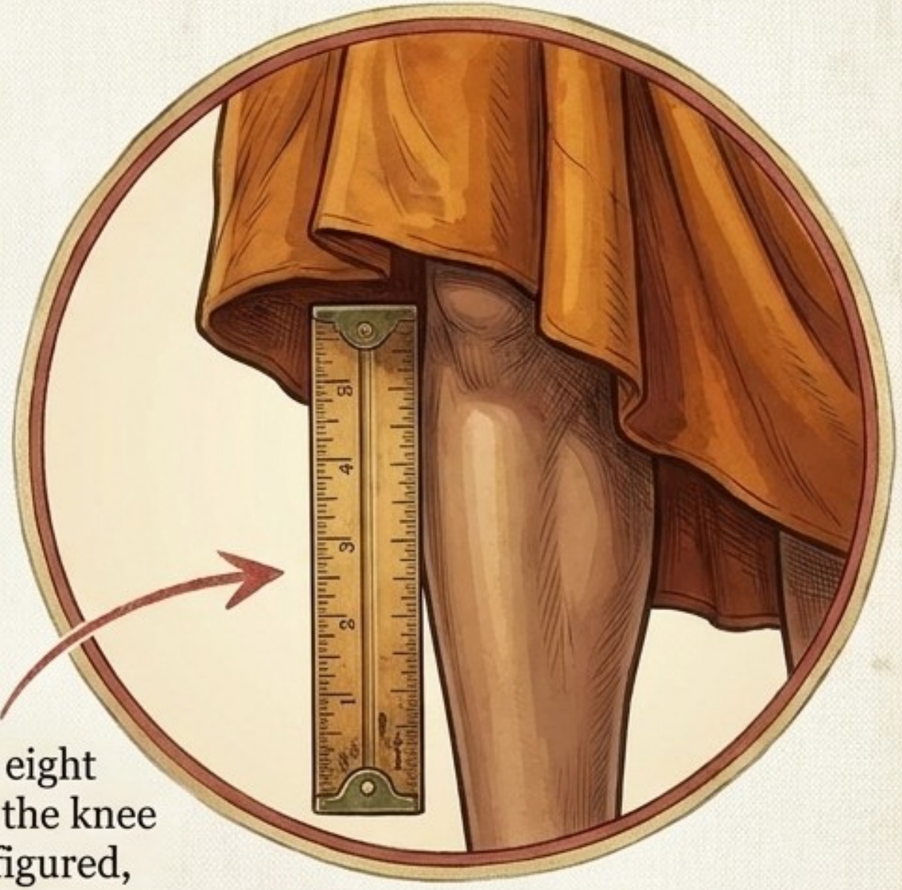
Robes must never hang down in front or back. Lay styles—such as gathering the cloth into “100 pleats” or tucking it between the legs—are strictly prohibited in the village.



Top Edges: Kept perfectly in line with each other.

Upper Edge: Circles the waist, covering the navel.

Lower Edge: Covers the kneecaps.



Drop Length: Exactly eight fingerbreadths below the knee (unless calves are disfigured, allowing a lower drop).

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The Importance of the Waistband

A monk entering a village must securely fasten his waistband. This rule was instigated after a monk suffered the unforgettable experience of his lower robe slipping off in front of an amused crowd.

The Essentials

- Do not enter without the outer robe.
- Do not wear footwear.
- Do not use an umbrella or sunshade.

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The Anatomy of Perfected Movement

The Head: Kept perfectly still. Uncovered by cloth. No swinging from side to side; no drooping forward or back.

The Arms: Kept still and off the hips (no arms akimbo). A slight swing to maintain balance while walking is permitted.

The Hands: Well-restrained. No playing, dancing, cracking knuckles, or wiggling fingers.

The Torso: Kept rigidly straight. No swinging or swaying of the body.

The Feet: Planted firmly. No tiptoeing and no walking solely on the heels.

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The Geometry of the Downcast Eye

To prevent aimless gazing at the sights of the village, a monk must keep his gaze lowered to the ground exactly the distance of a plow's length ahead of him.

Exemption:

Looking up is permitted for specific reasons, such as checking for approaching dangers like horses, elephants, or modern traffic.

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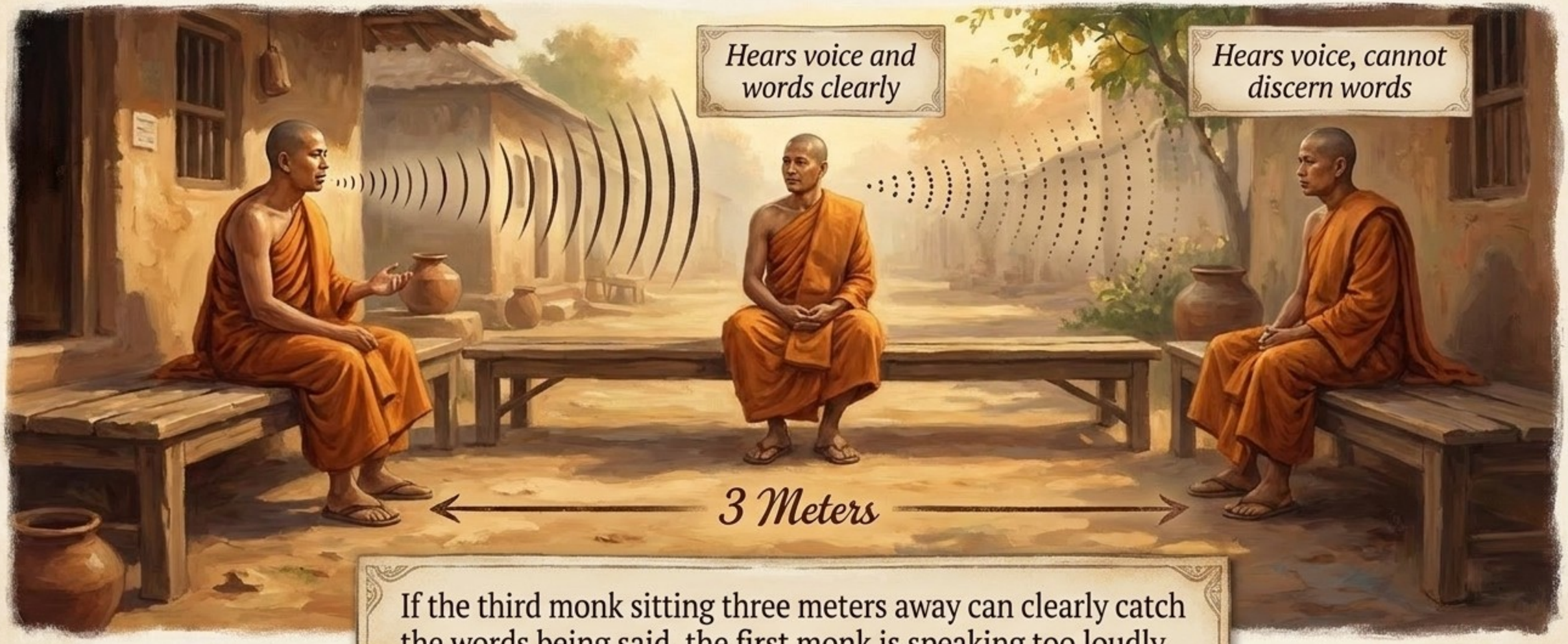
The Acoustic Threshold of Restraint

Speech in inhabited areas must be strictly modulated. Loud laughter is equally forbidden; if there is reason for amusement, a monk should simply smile.



If the third monk sitting three meters away can clearly catch the words being said, the first monk is speaking too loudly.

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Taking a Seat in the Village

When seated in an inhabited area, a monk remains well-covered, never exposing his chest or knees. He must never sit clasping his knees or use a cloth strap to prop himself up, a posture historically associated with lounging royalty.

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The Bounds of Pragmatism

The Exemption Matrix

Scenario		Strict Rule	Pragmatic Reality
Climbing a high ladder or tree.		Robes perfectly wrapped.	Tuck the lower robe between legs for decency.
A villager is about to fall off a cliff.		Maintain a lowered voice.	Shout to warn them (Danger exemption).
Torrential rain or crossing a river.		Wear all three robes.	Leave robes in a secure hiding place, like a hollow tree.
Inside a private room or residence.		Perfect physical restraint.	Rules regarding swinging limbs, head covering, and hitching robes do not apply.

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The Architecture of a Silent Teaching

These minor matters of etiquette are not arbitrary punishments. They are tools of communication.

When the wanderer Sāriputta first saw Ven. Assaji walking for alms—gracious in his approach, his eyes downcast, his every movement consummate—he was instantly convinced that Assaji had found the path to the Deathless, simply by observing his physical presence.

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Physical Presence is Communication

A monk must always remind himself that the minor details of his behavior can make the exact difference between sparking and killing another person's interest in the Dhamma. Ignorance of one's own posture is a form of disrespect. Through the Sekhiya rules, every step, gaze, and breath in the village becomes a silent, visual teaching.

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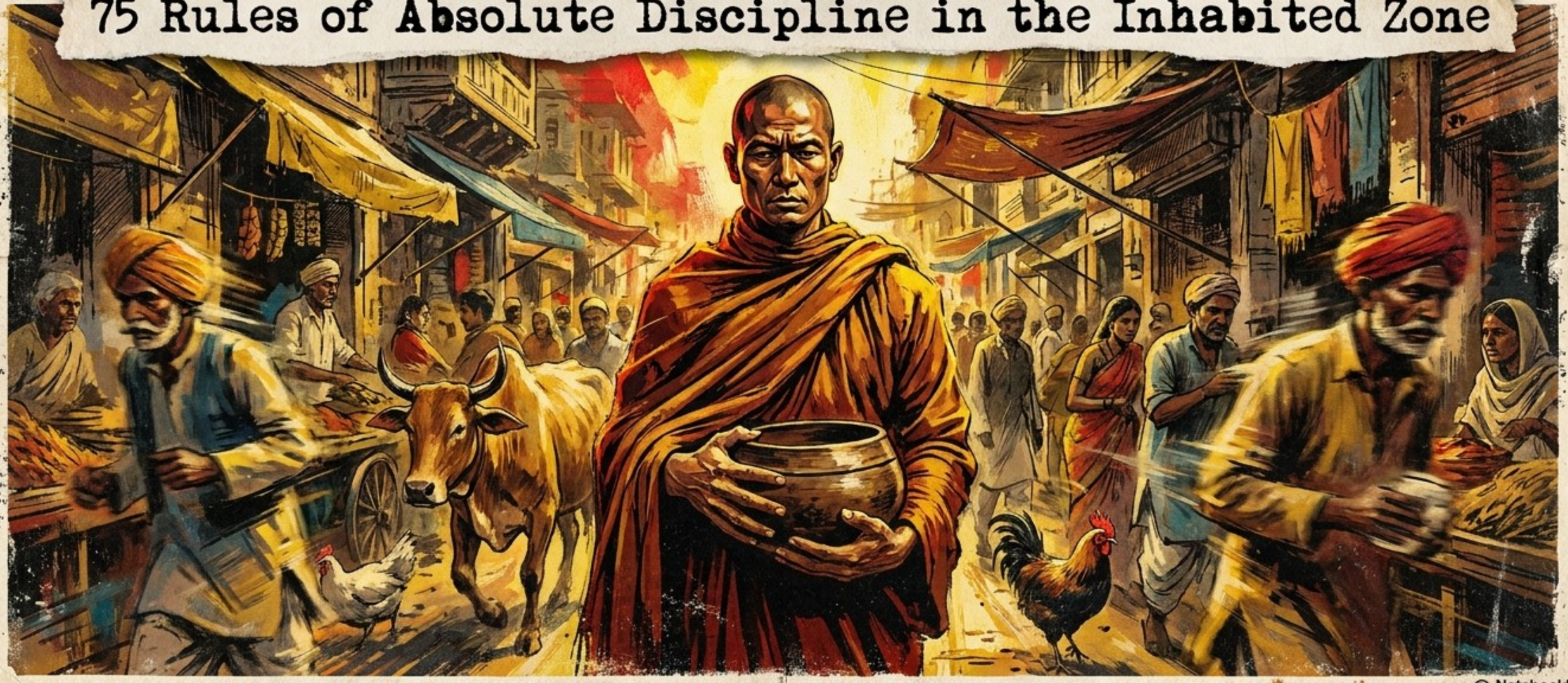
THE SEKHIYA PROTOCOLS

75 Rules of Absolute Discipline in the Inhabited Zone



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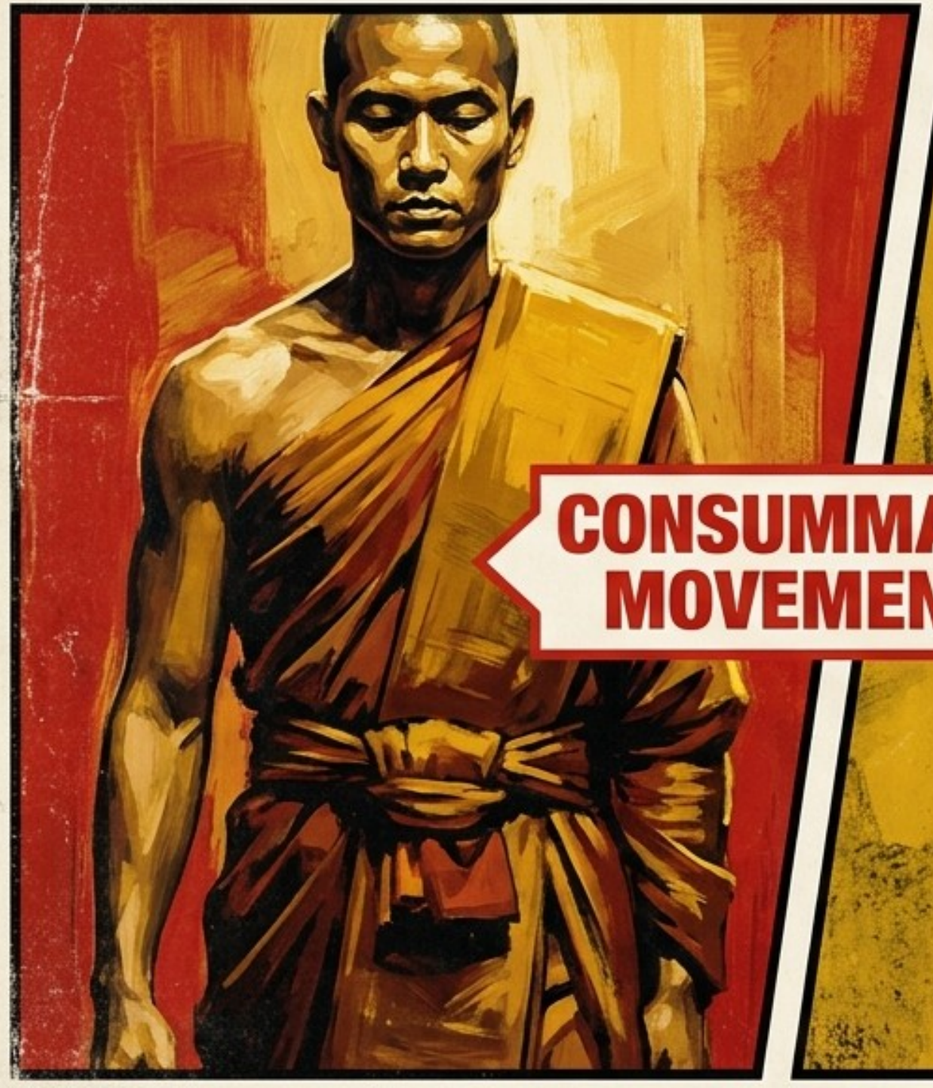
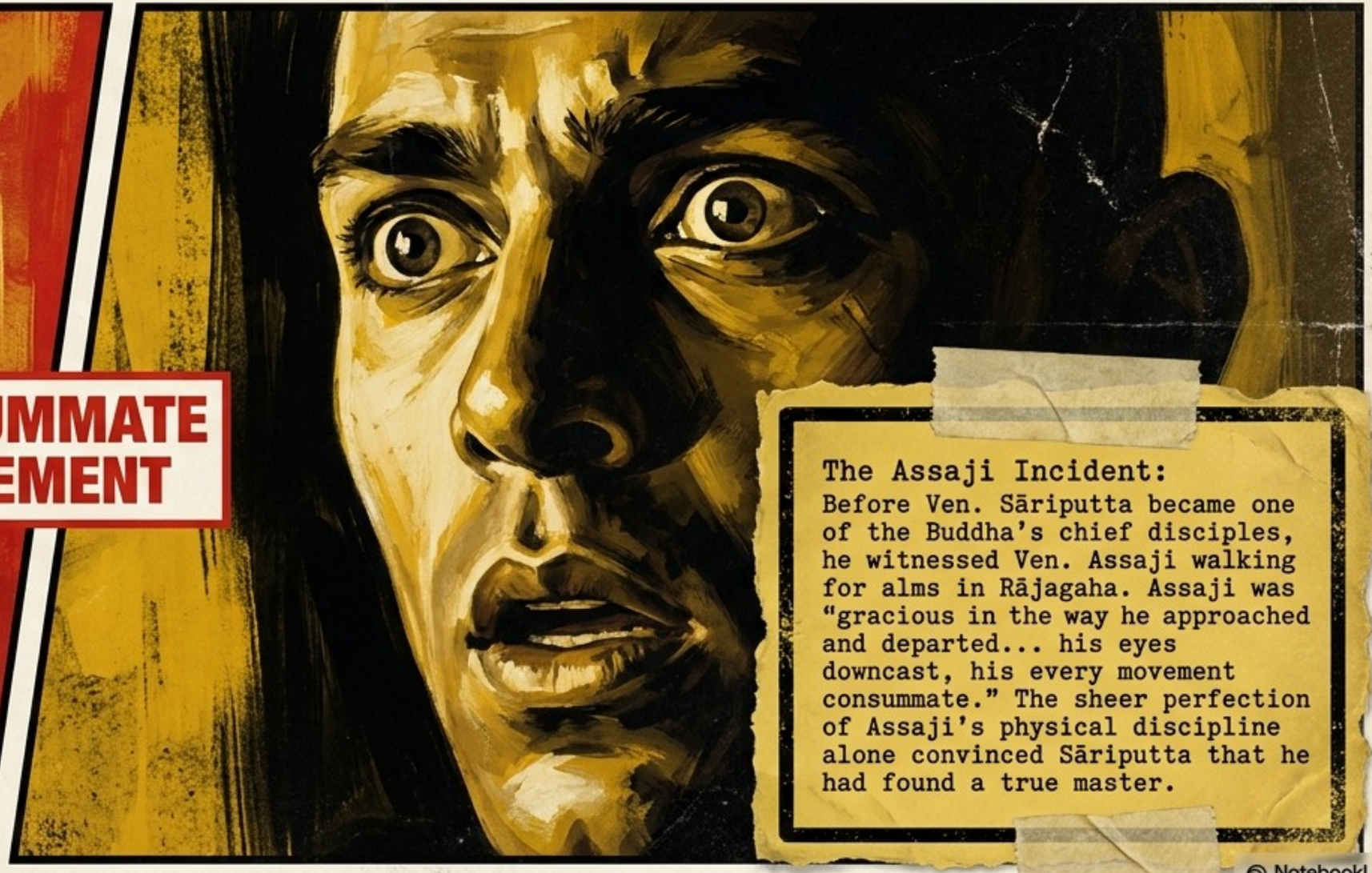
THE STAKES OF MINOR OPERATIONS

The minor details of a bhikkhu's behavior dictate whether he sparks or kills another person's interest in the Dhamma.





The Assaji Incident:

Before Ven. Sāriputta became one of the Buddha's chief disciples, he witnessed Ven. Assaji walking for alms in Rājagaha. Assaji was "gracious in the way he approached and departed... his eyes downcast, his every movement consummate." The sheer perfection of Assaji's physical discipline alone convinced Sāriputta that he had found a true master.

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THE THREAT LANDSCAPE & OPERATIONAL THEATERS

Theater 1: Etiquette in inhabited areas (Dressing & Behaving)	Theater 2: Almsfood (Accepting & Eating)
Theater 3: Teaching the Dhamma	Theater 4: Waste (Urinating, Defecating, Spitting)

RESTRICTED

THE IGNORANCE CLAUSE

There is no penalty for violating rules unintentionally, unthinkingly, or unknowingly. Critically, the Commentary clarifies that "unknowingly" means not knowing a situation contrary to the rules has developed (e.g., your robe got out of kilter). It does not mean ignorance of the rulebook. A new bhikkhu failing to learn the rules is a considered an act of disrespect.

Penalty Assessment:

The rules themselves do not impose a direct penalty; they are "a training to be observed." However, violating them out of disrespect incurs a Dukkaṭa offense.

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TACTICAL GEAR SCHEMATIC: SECURING THE 'THREE CIRCLES'

Zone A (The Waist): Upper edge of the lower robe circles the waist, perfectly covering the navel.

Zone C (Upper Robe): Both ends of the top edge remain in line. Both ends of the bottom edge remain in line.

Zone B (The Knees): Lower edge covers the kneecaps (max eight fingerbreadths below the knees when standing).

WARNING: CIVILIAN MIMICRY STRICTLY PROHIBITED

Robes must not hang down in front or back. Bhikkhus must never wear robes in the style of laypeople (e.g., pleated with "100 pleats," tied up, or tucked between the legs).

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ENVIRONMENTAL OVERRIDE: HIGH-ALTITUDE DECENCY

The ‘Three Circles’ rule applies strictly in monasteries and wilderness areas. However, operational realities require pragmatic overrides.

- The Ladder/Tree Exception: If working on a high ladder or in a tree—whether in a village, a monastery, or the wilderness—a bhikkhu is authorized to tuck the lower robe up between the legs for decency’s sake.

- The Sauna Protocol: En route to the sauna, robes do not need to cover the three circles as long as private parts are covered front and back.

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PERIMETER INFILTRATION:
PRE-ENTRY CHECKLIST
START: Entering an inhabited area (homes, streets, alleys)?
STEP 1 (Core Gear): Are all three basic robes equipped? (YES -> Proceed).
WARNING
ESCEPTIUNS
(Can proceed without all 2 robes 1f):
Iil / Sign of rain /
Kathina privilagee active /
Crnssing a tiver /
Uare a "secnrs dnelling"
lo.g., hollow tree or roakl to hide the left-behind robe.
STEP 2 (Prohibited Items):
Footwear rsmoved? (Shoes forbidden unless ill).
Umbrella/Sunshade stowed? (Forbidden unless ill, mentally uncomfortable, or raining).
STEP 3 (Coverage):
"Uell-covered" achieved? Upper edge around neck, lower edge covering wrists, knees covered. Chest hidden.
FINAL CHECK: Waistband secured?
-> PROCEED INTO INHABITED ZONE.

THE WAISTBAND INCIDENT: A CAUTIONARY TALE

The strict mandate to wear a waistband when entering an inhabited area is not arbitrary. It stems from a specific historical incident.

"The bhikkhu who instigated this rule had the unforgettable experience of having his lower robe slip off in front of a group of people who thoroughly enjoyed the spectacle."

(Cv.V.29.1)

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COMPOSURE CONTROL MATRIX

No swinging the body. Keep the torso perfectly straight.

No swinging arms. (Minor swinging for balance while walking is permitted).

No swinging the head from side to side, or letting it droop. (Exemption: Dozing off).

No hands on hips. Neither one nor both arms akimbo.

No walking on tiptoes or exclusively on heels.

No clasping knees. Do not hug knees with arms, or use a cloth strap around the knees and torso.

Note: Rules regarding swinging, akimbo, and clasping do not apply when sitting safely within one's own residence in an inhabited area.

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VISUAL DISCIPLINE: THE 2-METER GAZE RADAR

When operating in inhabited areas, a bhikkhu must maintain strict visual containment to prevent aimlessly gazing at surrounding sights.

"A Plow's Length"
= Exactly 2 Meters.

The gaze must remain lowered and locked onto the ground within this exact operational radius.

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GAZE OVERRIDE: SCANNING FOR INCOMING THREATS

The strict 2-meter visual containment is a training in focus, not a suicide pact. The gaze lock is instantly overridden by situational hazards.

A bhikkhu is authorized to look up and scan the environment if there is reason to suspect dangers—such as approaching horses, charging elephants, or modern roadway traffic.

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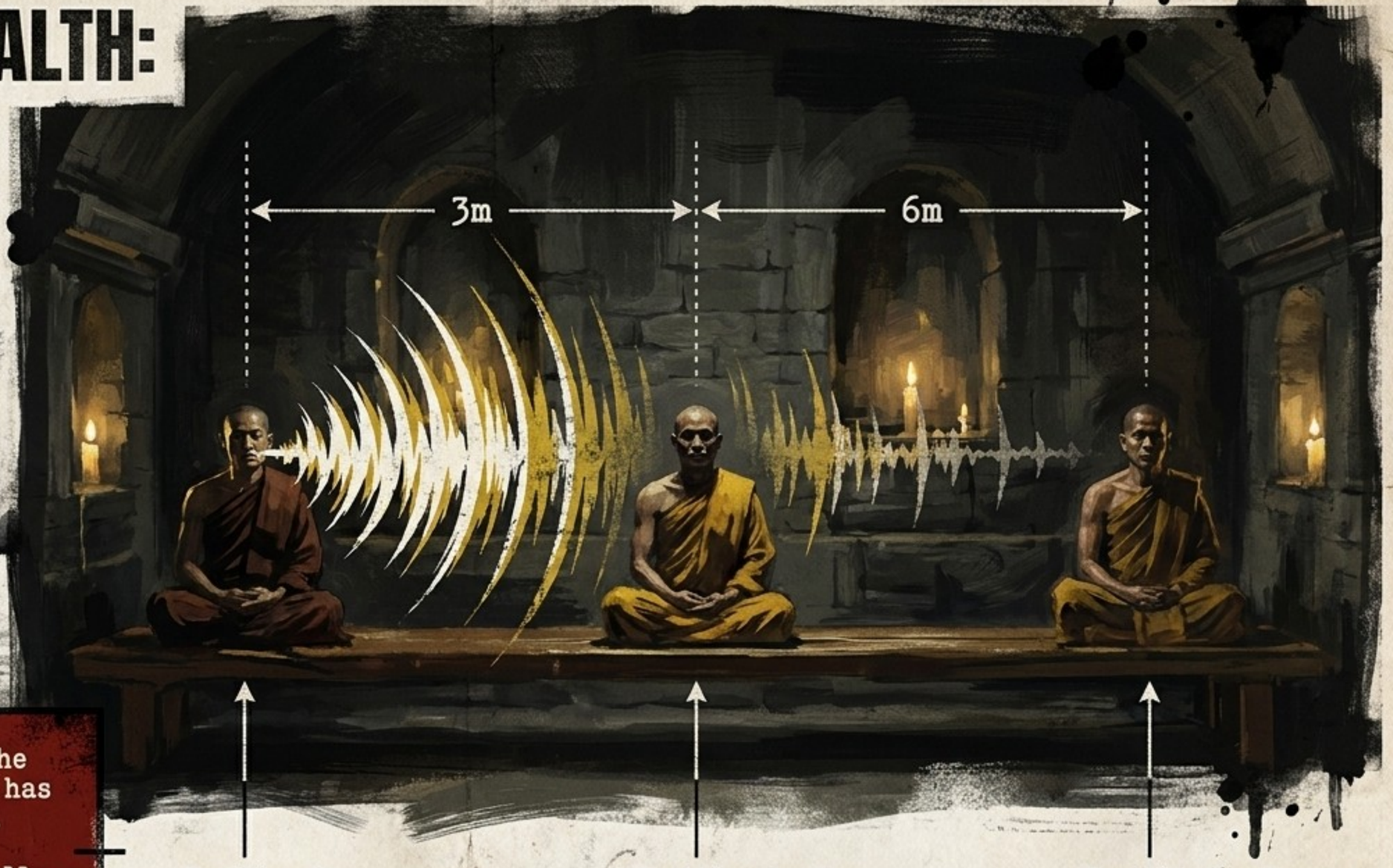
ACOUSTIC STEALTH: THE 3-METER WHISPER RULE

The Commentary provides a strict, mathematically precise definition of what constitutes a "lowered voice" in inhabited areas.



If Monk 3 can understand the words being spoken, Monk 1 has violated acoustic protocol.

(Note: Speaking to a crowd allows raising the voice, provided one does not shout).

Position 0m: Speaks in a lowered voice.

Position 3m: Hears the voice and can clearly catch the words.

Position 6m: Hears the sound of the voice, but CANNOT catch the words.

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LAUGHTER PROTOCOL: No loud laughing in inhabited areas. If there is reason for amusement, the authorized response is a simple smile.
TOP SECRET

EXPRESSION CONTROL & EMERGENCY VOLUME

SHOUTING OVERRIDES: The 'lowered voice' rule is suspended, and shouting is fully authorized, if:
- There is immediate danger (e.g., someone falling off a cliff or stepping in front of a car).
- The listener is partially deaf.
CLASSIFIED

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THE CONSUMMATE PRESENCE

The 75 Sekhiya rules are not punishments; they are exact operational specifications for embodying the Dhamma in a chaotic world.

By synchronizing these protocols, a bhikkhu achieves absolute presence:

- Tactical Gear: Perfectly secured robes erase civilian distraction.
- Stealth Movement: Elimination of swinging and tiptoeing creates frictionless passage.
- Restricted Gaze: The 2-meter radar ensures total internal focus.
- Acoustic Control: The 3-meter whisper prevents disruption of the environment.

True action-hero mastery is not about conquering the hazard zone-it is about moving through it with such absolute, unwavering stillness that you change the minds of everyone watching.

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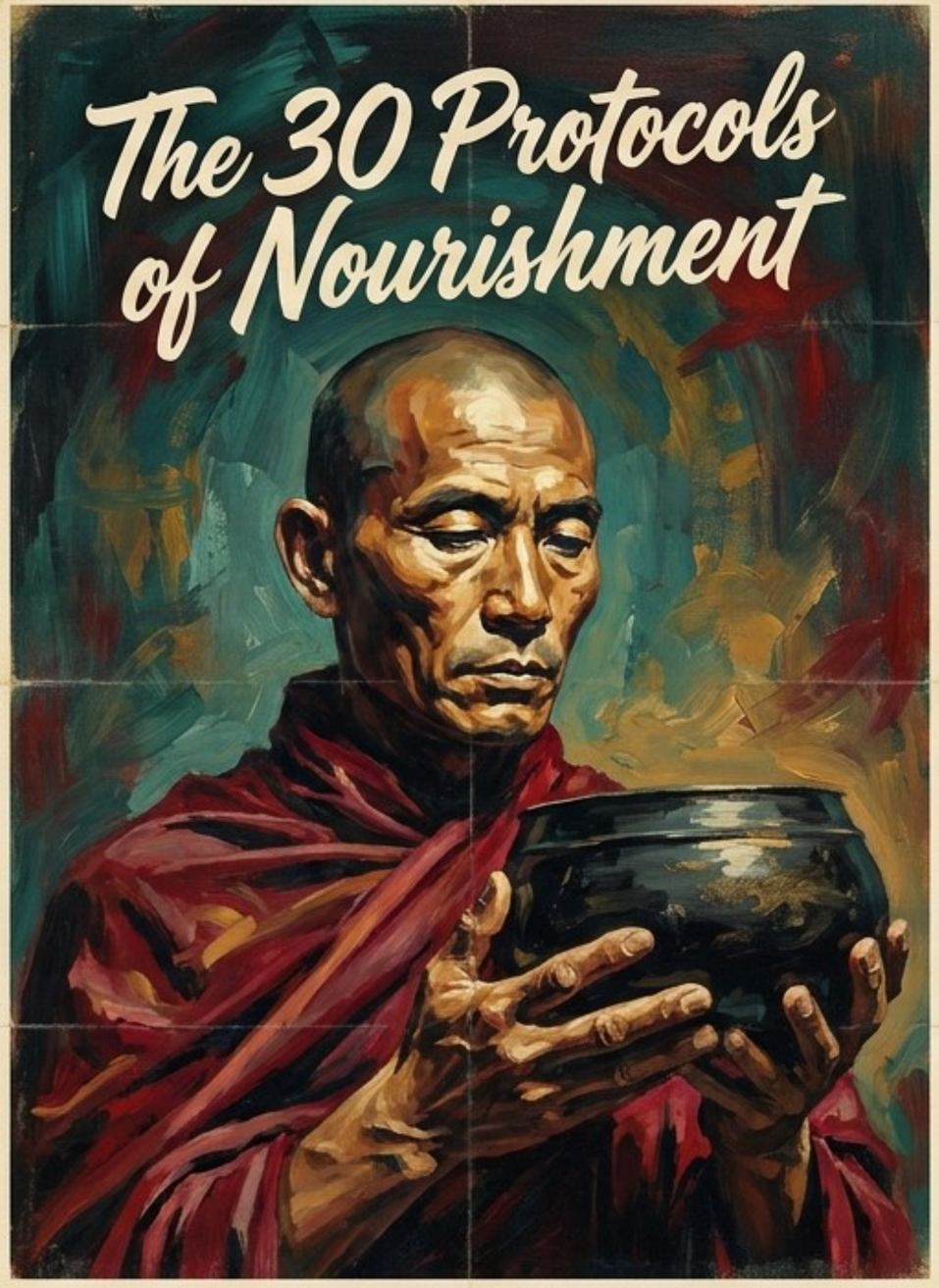
The 30 Protocols of Nourishment



A cinematic exploration of the ancient Vinaya food rules—where the mechanics of eating become a masterclass in human restraint, mindfulness, and compassion.

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The Dual Mandate of the Alms Bowl

The 30 Sekhiyas dealing with food are not arbitrary dictates of ancient politeness. They are a highly engineered behavioral code driven by two simultaneous forces:

1. Internal Mindfulness

Eating not playfully, nor for intoxication, nor for putting on bulk, but purely for survival to support the celibate life and end afflictions. (Killing greed).

2. External Compassion

Constantly reminding oneself of the trouble and expense donors incur to provide the meal. (Respecting the offering).

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ACT I: The Gathering
To receive without greed. To look without longing.

The Gaze and the Posture

Focus on the Bowl

The primary rule requires receiving almsfood with attention fixed downward, preventing aimless gazing or staring at the donor's face.

The Compassionate Glance

The nuance dictates one must not turn away too soon. A monk must subtly glance at what the donor has prepared to ensure they do not wait for more when the donor is finished, or leave while food is still being offered.

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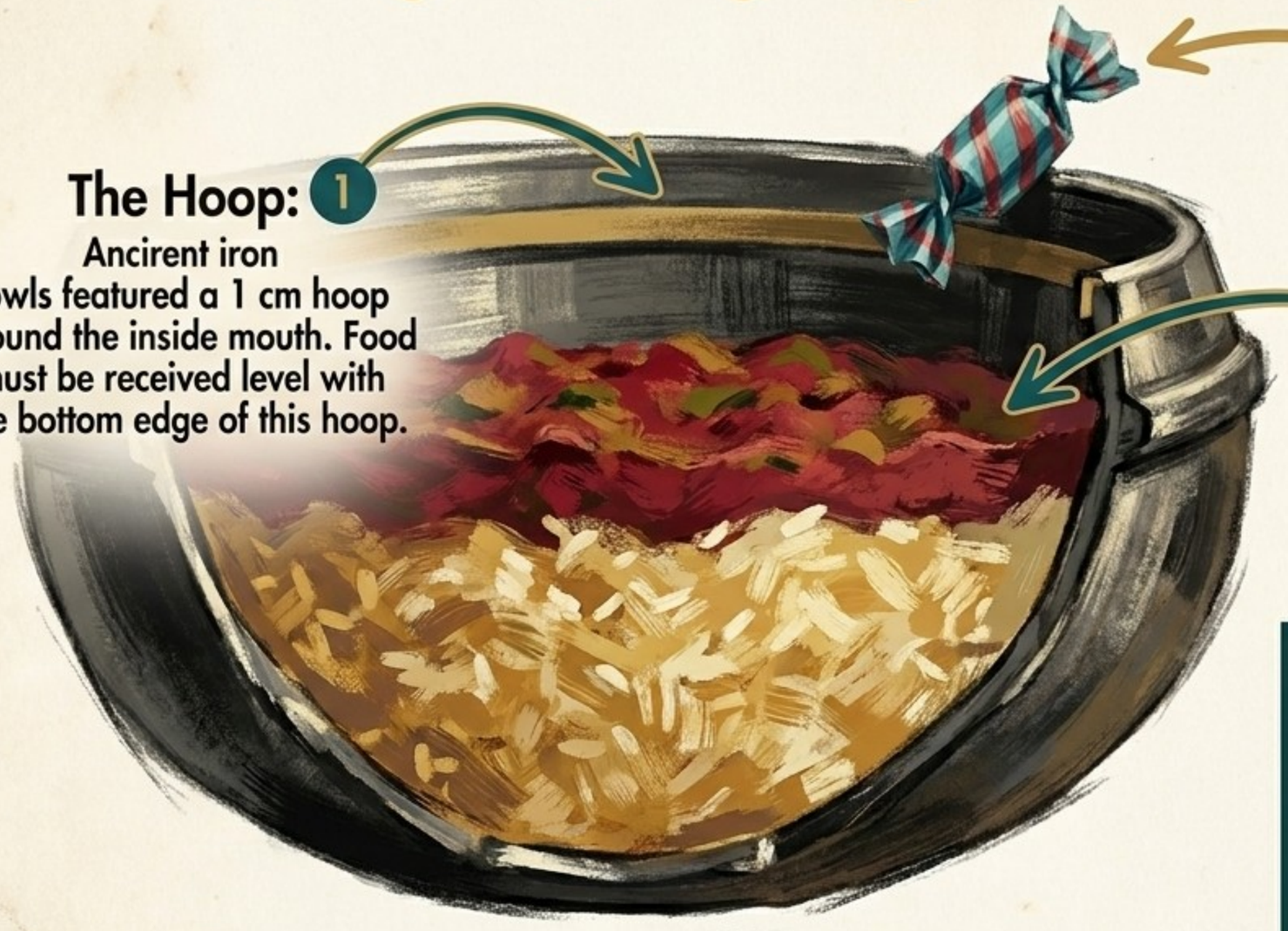
Topography of the Alms Bowl



1 The Hoop:

Ancirent iron bowls featured a 1 cm hoop around the inside mouth. Food must be received level with the bottom edge of this hoop.

2 The 25% Rule:

Bean curry (thick dishes of gram, pulses) must not exceed one-quarter of the total food. (Other soups/sauces are exempt).

3 Breaking the Edge:

Wrappers of sweets or lengths of sugar cane are legally permitted to visually break the edge of the bowl.

The Modern Exemption

If receiving just one bowlful denies family members the chance to give, emptying the bowl to receive more demonstrates compassion, not greed, and incurs no offense.

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ACT II:
The Feast of Mindfulness
Eating for survival,
not for intoxication.
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The Mechanics of the Plate

Methodical Consumption

Work steadily across the food from one side to another. No picking here and there (unless saving a special treat for the end, or sharing).

Do Not Disrupt the Heap

One must not take mouthfuls from the middle or top of a heap of food. Start from the side.

Exception: Stacked Sweets

If served items like sweets stacked on a platter, leveling them would collapse the heap. In this specific scenario, one may take from the top.

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Anatomy of the Mindful Mouthful

The Perfect Size

A mouthful the size of a peacock egg is too large, and a chicken egg is too small. The ideal bite rests precisely midway.

Capacity

Do not eat stuffing out the cheeks. (Exceptions granted for large solid fruits or confections).

Forming the Bite

Mouthfuls must be rounded. No eating from lifted balls (tossing food into the mouth).

Timing

The mouth must not open before the food has arrived.

Physical Boundaries

Do not insert the whole hand into the mouth while eating.

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The Symphony of Silence

No Speaking

Do not speak with a mouth full of food, unless the amount is small enough that pronunciation remains perfectly clear.

No Licking

Do not eat licking the lips, the bowl, or the hands. (Exception: When eating semi-liquid food, fingertips may be used and lightly cleaned to prevent spilling).

No Slurping or Smacking

A former actor, hearing monks slurping a milk drink, joked: "It's as if this entire Saṅgha were cooled." The Buddha imposed a rule against the noise—and a penalty for joking about the Saṅgha.

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The Wandering Eye & Hidden Motives

Preventing Jealousy

Do not look at another's bowl intent on finding fault. This prevents jealousy over someone possessing a special food they are not sharing. (Note: Looking to see if another monk lacks something to help them is allowed).

Preventing Manipulation

Do not hide bean curry or food with rice out of a desire to get more. This prevents the manipulation of kind donors who might offer extra food if they falsely believe a monk has nothing but plain rice.

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ACT III:
The Cleanse
Leaving no trace upon the earth or the community.

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Water and Earth: The Cleanup Protocol

Step 1: The Vessel

A monk must not accept a water vessel with a hand soiled by food, unless taking it with the express intention: "I will wash it or get it washed."

Step 2: The Rinsing

When rinsing the bowl, water containing grains of rice must not be thrown away in an inhabited area.

Resolution

The grains must be removed, squashed to dissolve in the water, poured into a dedicated receptacle, or carried outside the inhabited area to be discarded.

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The Matrix of Allowances

The Vinaya is rigorous, but not merciless. Specific conditions allow for the suspension of standard protocols.

[Empty Corner]	When Ill	From Relatives / Invited	From Own Resources	Meṇḍaka Allowance (Wilderness)
Receiving > 25% Bean Curry	✓	✓	✓	✗
Requesting Rice/Curry for Oneself	✓	✓	✓	✓ (Search allowed)
Looking at Another's Bowl (Fault)	✗	✗	✗	✗
Hiding Food to Get More	✗	✗	✗	✗

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The Modern Mirror

The Crumb Protocol

The practice of leaving a few uneaten crumbs to be washed away is an act of extreme politeness—preventing the host from feeling they provided too little—and acts as a final gift of sustenance to small insects.

The Rule of Stringency

The Vinaya-mukha acknowledges that ancient and modern manners often clash. The ultimate insight: Wherever ancient and modern codes of etiquette are at variance, the wise policy is to adhere to whichever code is more stringent.

These 30 rules are not chains, but anchors—a timeless exercise in transforming the daily requiement of eating into a masterpiece of self-mastery.

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